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ABSTRACT

The paper explores problems that frequently cause migrant students to become high school dropouts and outlines possible solutions; it chronologically reviews developments to provide continuity in migrant students' secondary education programs; and outlines further needed action. Identified as barriers to completion of high school are the economic necessity for migrant students to work; the negative attitudes of schools toward migrant students; the bewildering array of curriculums, requirements, and class schedules; specific state/local graduation proficiency standards; and access to special educational services because of mobile life styles and/or rural nature of schools. Cited among developments to provide credit accrual/exchange for secondary migrant students are the 1971 Migrant Student Record Transfer System and a 1981 National Policy Workshop on Education for Migrant Secondary Students. A chart outlines solutions, initiatives, and agencies having ultimate control for eight migrant student problems: lack of credit reciprocity, lack of fractional credit transfer, lack of course continuity, language barriers, inconsistent grade placement, inaccessible vocational and special programs, inaccessibility of mandated competency tests, and absence of alternative instruction. Recommended actions are supporting/adopting resolutions of the National Policy Workshop, implementing solutions offered by the Interstate Migrant Secondary Services Program, and explaining these policies/procedures at the state level. (NEC)

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MOBILITY AND CONTINUITY: NEW WAYS OF LOWERING DROPOUT RATES FOR MIGRANT STUDENTS THROUGH CREDIT ACCRUAL AND EXCHANGE

Vicente Z. Serrano
Interstate Migrant Project

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INTRODUCTION

By the time children of migrant workers reach adolescence, they are under considerable pressure. Their time and energies are needed to help their parents, primarily by working in the fields, to help supplement the family income. But they are also needed to help with housekeeping chores and the care of younger brothers and sisters. There is little time left for homework, or more to the point, for school.

An inability to devote the necessary time to schoolwork is particularly damaging to prospects for graduation. By the time migrant students reach the middle school level, they are typically well behind their age mates as a result, primarily, of their high rate of mobility. Mobility causes them to miss quite a bit of school at the elementary level and results in serious discontinuities in their education program. Seventy percent of migrant students are Hispanics, and many have serious language problems — a factor which also contributes to their falling farther and farther behind in school. As pressures increase to enter the work force, these students, who are already behind, are very likely to leave school. Migrant students, in the past, have had a dropout rate of 90 percent or more, and it is only now beginning to show signs of declining.

High school presents yet another series of hurdles for migrant students. In addition to being behind academically and under considerable pressure to work, high school students must also begin to plan school schedules that will insure that they

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meet the requirements of the school they expect to graduate from. That is not easy to do in other schools, districts and states -- all of which have graduation requirements of their own -- particularly when they are only temporary stopping places during the course of the school year. Migrant students at the high school level are confronted with a maze of different programs, curricula and testing practices as they move from place to place, all of which must be reconciled with their home school graduation requirements and other competing demands on their time.

Educators have recognized the disruptive effects that mobility has on the participation and performance of migrant students in education programs. With the enactment in 1966 of an amendment to Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (now Chapter One of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act, ECIA), the Migrant Education Program came into existence to address these problems in a systematic way. In a relatively short period of time, the Migrant Education Program made possible a variety of new programs, procedures and structures that, in turn, began to make possible a greater degree of continuity in the education of migrant students.

Funds became available for specialized programs, to help migrant students close the achievement gap that separated them from other students in their age group. These funds were used to reimburse school districts that enrolled students in the Migrant Education Program, providing an incentive to districts to identify migrant students and to design programs for them. The Migrant Student Record Transfer System (MSRTS) also came into existence,

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permitting the development of a computerized data base on each individual migrant student.

More important, from the standpoint of improving continuity, the MSRTS makes possible the rapid transmission of student health and education information from school to school. It also provides "skills inventories" in basic skill areas, making it possible for teachers to determine which skills and competencies individual students have already learned and to update their records as they learn new ones -- before they proceed onward to the next receiving school.

Recently, the MSRTS has provided a vehicle for attacking the problem of secondary credit accrual and exchange. The student record format has been expanded to: (1) provide information about the high school graduation requirements the student must meet, and (2) to indicate how many units, or partial units, of credit the student has earned in different subject matter areas. Teachers and counselors in receiving schools can then get a better understanding of what the student will need in the way of course work in order to graduate, and how much he or she has already accomplished.

In spite of the achievements, in terms of addressing complex and different logistical problems, secondary migrant students continue to experience difficulties in obtaining high school diplomas. While the dropout rate does appear to be declining, from 90 percent or more to about 70 percent, the existence of procedures and structures does not in itself insure a satisfactory level of continuity in the education of secondary students.

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Today's challenges are those, primarily, of bringing about a greater utilization by school districts of the MSRTS and encouraging a greater degree of reciprocity between schools in the accrual and exchange of credit. The problem is not so much "know how" as it is of overcoming the inertia that is based in part on expectations from the past, and in part on a fairly limited understanding of what can be done. The role of the ECS Interstate Migrant Education Task Force, which has been in operation since 1976, is that of helping to encourage both a wider understanding of new approaches to improving education for migrant students and helping educators and policy makers overcome the different kinds of barriers that tend to prevent improvements from taking place.

This paper, as a result of the work of the Task Force, is designed to further those objectives. Specifically, the purpose of this paper is: (1) to explore more carefully the specific problems, and approaches to dealing with them, that frequently cause migrant students to drop out rather than complete their high school education; (2) to review chronologically those developments that have improved our capability to provide a greater degree of continuity in the education programs of secondary migrant students; and (3) to point to the next steps that must be taken if we are to fully realize the benefits that past investments make possible.

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I. THE PROBLEMS

Two reports on migrant student achievement highlight the need for improvement in secondary school programs for migrant students. A 1974 California report noted that achievement skills at the elementary level were typically two to three years behind expectation. One result of achievement lags as students entered high school, according to the California report, was that fewer than 10 percent of these students graduated from high school. Another study, prepared by Exotech Systems, Inc. (1975), concluded that the average migrant student has a 40 percent chance of entering the 9th grade, an 11 percent chance of entering the 12th grade, and less than a 10 percent chance of graduating from high school.

Close examination of the problems faced by most secondary migrant students has resulted in the identification of five major barriers to completion of high school:

1. Economic necessity, i.e., the need for migrant students to work. A report by the California State Department of Education noted that "about the end of the sophomore year, when many students are reaching 16 years of age, the economic pressures on migrant students by their peers and their families to leave school and become a full-wage earner become quite heavy."

2. Schools often have a negative attitude toward migrant students. A 1980 California State Department of Education Ad Hoc Committee report found that many school district personnel feel "that migrant students are not interested in graduation and that in many cases it does not matter, as their probable future does not require a diploma."

3. Students face a bewildering array of curriculums, requirements and class schedules. One analysis of state curricular requirements found 116 different courses required by state statutes (Ogletree, 1979). Even when

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the differences in curriculum are minimized by cooperation between SEAs, such as the Texas/Washington Project, adjusting schedules or finding classes for students remains a problem (Hunter and Perry, 1980). A student may not be able to get the same five classes in a receiving school that s/he was taking in the home-base school because the courses are not offered, are full, or are scheduled at times when the student cannot take them.

4. Specific state or local proficiency or competency standards may impede graduation or continuation for a number of reasons. First, if students do poorly on the tests they are likely to be discouraged. Second, the remedial classes for those students who fail may be held when the students are out of the district or state. Third, there is no clear picture of whether a passing score in one state can be transferred to another state.

5. Access to many special types of education services is cut off for migrant students because of their mobile life style or because of the rural nature of many of the schools the students attend. For example, a review of special education for handicapped students found that migrant students were not being served at a rate similar to nonmobile students (Pyecha, 1980), although it is well established that migrant students have an unusually high incidence of health and handicapping conditions.

Mobility as a Special Concern

In developing an approach to addressing the needs of the estimated one million migrant students in America, it is necessary to recognize the impact of mobility on their educational development. As a group, they do share many of the characteristics of other special needs populations -- poverty, language differences, negative stereotyping by others, health and handicapping conditions, urban and rural isolation,* etc. -- and

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*During the winter months, many migrant students attend schools in large urban areas, but during the growing/harvesting season, they are to be found in sparsely populated rural areas.

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need the same kind of services that other special needs students do. But those needs are secondary to the need for continuity in the student's educational program, a need that cannot be fully understood unless the effects of mobility are understood.

Over the years, various studies have cited mobility as a disruptive factor in the education of migrant students. Three recent studies call further attention to some of the problems attributable to mobility:

1. Poe and Rice, Needs Barriers and Evaluation of Secondary Migrant Vocational Education ... 1979.

> .... There was general agreement across most local vocational educators and between most local vocational and migrant directors regarding the issues, barriers and needs that must be addressed in order to provide effective vocational education for the population .... Of the 28 suggested barriers, six were judged to have been not only valid but also highly critical by over one-third of the respondents.

Three of six barriers, that speak to the mobility issue, and here ranked according to perceived importance were:

> Constant movements of students from one LEA to another. (No. 1)
>
> Irregular school attendance, often attributed to employers' needs, is a handicap to worthwhile participation in a vocational program. (No. 2)
>
> It is difficult to include parents in the educational program of the student due to items such as the lack of parental support and/or lack of parental understanding of the educational program ... (No. 3)

2. California -- Patterns of Migrant Education 1980.

> The pattern of schooling for migrant children is therefore characterized by an interrupted attendance record in which the migrant child loses significant amounts of time during the school year as compared to the attendance of other children .... Significant

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segments of instruction are missed by the migrant child and oftentimes, particularly in secondary schools, the instruction completed by such children when in attendance is not sufficient to receive the appropriate course credits ....

3. Barresi, J., Policy Options for Mobile Handicapped Students, 1980.

.... Mobility negatively affects achievement and self concept; information, planning and management systems do not presently address the issue of student mobility at the elementary and secondary school levels; there is less parent involvement among mobile populations than among stationary ones; there is inadequate interstate and interagency communication and cooperation on these students behalf; there is little information on the types of children who are mobile other than the migrant child.... The extent to which pupils change schools during the school year, within or between districts, as well as the characteristics of the mobile student population are factors that have significant implications for staffing, class assignment, curriculum design, purchasing, providing student transportation and establishing bus routes, record keeping and budgets (p. 8).

There are numerous opinions regarding the influence of mobility on migrant student education. Hard data regarding the relationship between the two are scarce or unavailable. Yet most studies identify mobility as the key disruptive factor affecting the education of migrant students.

Continuity Considerations and Issues

Providing for continuity in any child's educational program is problematic, particularly if the child moves frequently (and many, of course, who are not migrants do move frequently). For all students, progression from one grade to the next, or from one school to the next (i.e., from preschool to elementary, elementary to middle, middle to secondary, etc.), typically results in discontinuities in the educational program. The more times the

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student moves from school to school, the more severe those discontinuities are apt to be.

Migrant students experience many such moves during the course of their public school education. Although many tend to remain in the same migrant stream year after year, and return to the same schools in a fairly routine way, they still suffer severe discontinuities since each time they come back they are older and do not, therefore, return to the same setting's they left. They have had very different experiences than their non-mobile peers in the interim and the burden is on them to adapt back into the school on a different footing than they were on when they left.

A second factor is that migrant students need to articulate their educational programs with a variety of specialized programs in different settings -- e.g., bilingual programs, special education programs, compensatory education programs, etc. At the secondary level, they must replace a range of required and elective courses with comparable courses (which may or may not be available) in each school setting.

For each migrant family there are also health and other services (e.g., housing, day care) that have to be replaced or substituted for as they move from one community to the next. In spite of the fact that communities benefit from the transiency of migratory workers, who move elsewhere when their jobs run out, the fact remains that many communities often do not make adequate provision for migrant workers nor do they adequately coordinate existing programs/services around the recurrent influx of migrant workers. No serious effort is typically made along the 3 migrant

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streams to transfer information or records (other than in migrant education), or to develop joint plans that would insure that these people's basic needs will be met.

Thus, for individual migrant students and families, the responsibility for both vertical (age/grade level) continuity and lateral continuity is, with few exceptions, their own. The MSRTS and the Migrant Education Program, the migrant/rural health clinics, and a growing number of voluntary cooperative efforts by states, communities and school districts are encouraging examples of the nation's growing ability to plan more effectively for migrant workers and their children.

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II. CREDIT ACCRUAL AND EXCHANGE FOR SECONDARY STUDENTS -- CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

The MSRTS, the first massive interstate cooperative effort to address mobility and continuity was instituted with P.L. 89-750 funds and became a national reality in 1971. This computerized system has now been in operation 11 years and has operationalized the intent of Congress, as stated in Section 103 (C) (1) (A) of P.L. 89-750, providing for states to coordinate migrant programs and projects including the transmittal of pertinent health and education information for migrant children.

The MSRTS has provided a cohesive structure within which thousands of schools cooperatively devise and implement programs to improve the continuity of education and health care for, as of 1982, 666,684 migrant students. MSRTS serves approximately two-thirds of the total estimated migrant population of one million students, from early childhood to postsecondary. The Credit Accrual and Exchange Section of the MSRTS is presently being updated to accommodate the graduation requirements of the students' home-base school.

Actions by the Congress, the U.S. Department of Education and State Directors of Migrant Education were concurrent with a number of other activities including:

1. The Secondary Credit Exchange Program was developed in 1970 by a school teacher in the state of Washington. It was noted that older migrant students could not enroll in school because they needed to work in the fields to contribute to the total family income. She volunteered to tutor the older students on her own time if the principal could arrange for the students' home schools in Texas to grant credit for work done in Washington. The home schools agreed and the following year the program received Title I Migrant Program funding and was expanded to include additional schools. School districts in other

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states were also assisted in organizing and expanding credit exchange programs by the states of Washington and Texas, Title I Migrant Project offices.

2. A meeting of an ad hoc committee of migrant educators in Seattle, Washington in March 1980 to identify barriers faced by migrant students in secondary schools.

3. A seminar, convened by ECS in Washington, D.C., April 23-24, 1980, to discuss how secondary school programs for migrant students could be improved. This seminar was the first opportunity that many interested parties had to meet with local school administrators and representatives of national education associations.

4. The suggestion of the National Education Association (NEA) to broaden the definition of mobile students to include all students who move frequently. An examination of information on mobility and special education by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) found that some urban school districts experience extremely high pupil turnover rates and have problems similar to those of schools serving migrants. The result is that migrant education is serving as a model for educators interested in addressing the problems of intra- and inter-district mobility.

5. The request of the ECS Task Force and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) that the Department of Education sponsor and fund a national articulation conference every other year. The meetings would give local and state education agencies an opportunity to update critical information on curriculum, communications and graduation requirements.

6. A proposal (the Interstate Migrant Secondary Services Project) developed by a consortium of states in 1980, under Section 143 of ECIA, to develop a national cooperative secondary school program for migrant students. This project, directed by New York State, is the first national effort to address mobility and continuity related issues of migrant students in secondary schools.

7. The appointment of a committee on secondary education by the National Association of State Directors of Migrant Education (NASDME). The committee has committed itself to improving the flow of information to state leaders concerning the need for secondary school programs for migrant students and for institutionalizing cooperative programs. NASDME has been an active coordinating vehicle for new activities in secondary school programs, as well as a major sponsor of other related activities.

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III. DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW APPROACH TO CREDIT ACCRUAL AND EXCHANGE

The issue of credit accrual and exchange for mobile migrant secondary students is, as discussed above, a multi-faceted problem. The immediate question is, "How can a standardized approach, which fosters commonality among course graduation requirements earned from district to district, be developed?" The central outcome of the approach should be meaningful national guidelines for migrant student credit exchange and accrual that enable students to maintain continuity toward the achievement of graduation requirements.

The National Policy Workshop on Education for Migrant Secondary Students was held in August 1981, in Seattle, Washington, to address secondary education issues and opportunities. The workshop was sponsored under the aegis of Congressman William D. Ford, Chairman of the ECS Interstate Migrant Education Task Force, in cooperation with the National Association of State Directors of Migrant Education, the U.S. Department of Education and other education organizations. The goals of the workshop were to:

1. Heighten the awareness of participants about the problems and needs of secondary migrant students and promising approaches and potential solutions for meeting those needs.

2. Develop realistic recommendations for education policy makers in national organizations and at the federal, state and local levels.

3. Develop policy resolutions that would lead to the establishment of national procedures to ensure inter- and intra-state reciprocity of secondary exchange and accrual agreements.

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Approximately 200 people from 28 states attended the workshop. Chief state school officers, state and local superintendents, principals, state migrant education personnel and migrant project staff met in small group sessions and in general assembly to develop working policies to complement existing school programs.

Nine resolutions evolved from the workshop and were adopted by the participants to provide a foundation upon which education access, continuity and achievement can be realized by migrant students. The recommendations speak to federal, state and local decision makers and persons who have responsibility for program, student record and graduation requirements.

The recommendations and policy options are as follows:

1. Recognizing that a significant portion of the nation's population is mobile, and that such mobility limits a high school student's opportunity to meet state and local graduation units of credit requirement.

   Therefore, states and local school districts are encouraged to establish graduation requirements for migrant students by:

   A. Establishing reciprocity between and among districts for completed coursework for which credit has been granted from an accredited secondary institution.

   B. Granting full credit for demonstrated competence or performance, clock hours or proficiency tests.

   C. Issuing credit on a flexible, fractional basis.

   D. Accepting, sending and receiving schools' coursework to be continued in receiving schools.

   E. Acceptance of diplomas sent by students' home-base school in schools where students reside at the time of graduation.

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2. **Be it resolved** that each state make a concerted and coordinated effort to identify, recruit, enroll and provide education services for all secondary migrant students in that state. Effective communication should take place among all states and cooperating agencies in the identification and recruitment of secondary students in order to provide continuity of services for these students wherever they are found.

   Be it further resolved that, as part of this process, each state director compile and provide a resource directory of all agencies providing education, employment and/or training services to potential migrant students between the ages of 14 and 21.

   Be it further resolved that state agencies must improve and monitor the implementation of the MSRTS to insure the effective utilization of the system.

3. **Be it resolved** that each sending state school district provide, for its home-based migrant students, a course of study for graduation based on that local education agency's requirements, entered and maintained on the MSRTS, and updated by each receiving state in which that student is serviced by including:

   A. Competency test results.

   B. Language(s) of instruction.

   C. Home-base school address and phone number.

   D. Individual profile -- itinerary pattern so a child's migrancy pattern can be traced.

   E. The transcript to include but not be limited to:

      - Grade level,
      - What s/he has completed (status) regarding requirements.
      - Graduation requirements and the requirements the student has mastered as they apply to the school from which s/he will graduate.
      - Grade or performance percentage obtained at the time of transfer.
      - Actual dates of attendance.

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- When appropriate, a final and/or a semester grade.
- Flexibility to change a student's course of study when s/he settles out or the student changes educational goals.

Be it resolved that in the absence of an official transcript the credit accrual form of MSRTS will be an acceptable interim document of academic credits, courses to be completed, and such other items to be added and approved by the NASDME.

4. **Be it resolved** that states utilize whatever resources are available to disseminate information, to provide the opportunity to share program information, ideas, problems and solutions, and to model successful secondary migrant state programs.

5. **Be it resolved** that in states where competency tests are mandated, that the NASDME be encouraged to implement appropriate testing schedules to assure access by migrant secondary students. It is further recommended that the NASDME assume the leadership role in development of the prototype schedule for use by the states.

6. Whereas the success of the academic setting is contingent on a team effort between school and home,

   Be it resolved that the educational institution has the obligation to communicate requirements on high school credit accrual based on time and performance leading to high school graduation to parents of migrant secondary students.

   Be it further resolved that the school has the responsibility to encourage and welcome parent participation in the educational process of their children.

7. **Be it resolved** that schools assist migrant students in the attainment of a high school diploma or its equivalent either through a traditional school system or through an alternative certified program such as the High School Equivalency Program (HEP).

8. **Be it resolved** that each state which shares migrant students commit, as a priority, the necessary financial and human resources to coordinate the credit exchange accrual program.

   Be it further resolved that each state assign a contact person to accomplish this task.

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9. **Be it resolved** that the state agencies which operate migrant farmworker programs articulate program objectives and/or plans and seek the assistance of other agencies in the educational process.

   Be it further resolved that state agencies encourage, through incentive and/or regulation, the cooperation and coordination of resources at the state and local levels.

It will be the task of the NASDME, the federal office of migrant education and other concerned officials to transform these policy recommendations from statements into action. It will be important to work with professional organizations and other groups, such as the ECS Task Force, that can assist the implementation process.

Implementation Activities

As previously mentioned, a consortium of 11 states (California, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Michigan, Montana, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Texas and Washington) has designed a project, headquartered in New York, to achieve the interstate mandate of Section 143. The project goals and objectives are in concert with the work of the NASDME Secondary Committee and the resolutions and recommendations of the National Policy Workshop. This project, the Interstate Migrant Secondary Services Project (IMSSP), leads a national thrust to improve secondary services for migrant students, and is designed to achieve short range as well as long term approaches that will set a solid foundation for future development.

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The project characteristics and functions are:

1. technical assistance
2. regional workshops
3. resource personnel
4. research and information
5. communications
6. facilitators
7. problem identification and solutions.

No single problem-solving prescription will evolve from this project. Changing attitudes can take a generation -- sometimes a single follow-up phone call to the right high school counselor can guarantee the course credit needed for an elusive diploma, but sometimes a great deal more effort is required. A sustained, multi-faceted approach will be needed to adequately explore the opinions and to formulate flexible, comprehensive solutions.

The following chart suggests the migrant secondary range of problems and possible solutions that the IMSSP proposes to address, in concert with other cooperating entities (e.g., the ECS Interstate Migrant Education Project and Task Force and the NASDME Secondary Committee).

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MIGRANT SECONDARY STUDENT PROBLEMS, SOLUTIONS, INITIATIVE AND ULTIMATE CONTROL

Problems	Solution	Migrant Program Initiative	Ultimate Control
1. Lack of credit reciprocity	a. School to school communications b. Use of MSRTS credit accrual	Advocate contact and use	SEA/LEA
2. Lack of fractional credit transfer	a. School to school communication b. Use of MSRTS credit accrual	Advocate contact and use	SEA/LEA
3. Lack of course continuity	a. School to school communications b. Use of MSRTS course descriptions c. Follow Texas/Washington model and New York/Florida model	Advocate discussion, compromise, cooperation, and adoption of model program	SEA/LEA
4. Language barriers	Bilingual Instruction	a. Assess need b. Promote use of bilingual resources	SEA/LEA
5. Inconsistent grade placement	School to school communications to agree on most positive placement	Advocate discussion	LEA
6. Inaccessible vocational and special programs	Pre-registration (New York/Florida model)	Demonstrate and advocate working model	LEA
7. Inaccessibility of mandated competency tests	a. Schedule when migrant students are in state b. Administer in receiving states	Advocate schedule and administrative options	SEA
8. Absence of alternative instruction	a. Summer school b. Evening school c. Correspondence programs (P.A.S.S.)	Advocate adoption of plan(s) feasible for LEA's	LEA

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Source: Section 143 Project -- Interstate Migrant Secondary Services Project.

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IV. NEXT STEPS

The secondary education committee of NASDME, in conjunction with the MSRTS, has proposed an improved record transfer format that will improve the reporting of credits. This document will be utilized nationally after January 1983.

Recently the National Association of Secondary School principals has unanimously adopted a policy resolution that addresses the secondary exchange needs of migrant students. Within ECS, a policy paper supporting the recommendations of the Seattle National Policy Workshop for Secondary Migrant Students has been adopted. Other organizations have adopted positions that recognize the need to address, in substantive and comprehensive ways, the issues raised by student mobility.

As in many other areas of concern with respect to mobile populations, much of the technical know-how is well in hand. What is needed is the determination to implement the policies and procedures that are essential to bringing to fruition the initial investments that have been made. In answer to the question, "What can organizations and individuals do?" the following recommendations are made:

1. Support/adopt the resolutions of the National Policy Workshop.
2. Facilitate the implementation of the solutions offered by the Interstate Migrant Secondary Services Program (IMSSP).
3. Within your state, and to your colleagues, explain the purpose and need for these policies and procedures.
4. Facilitate or arrange presentations before your affiliates.

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5. Assist in obtaining funding, if needed, for implementation activities.

6. Assist, facilitate or participate in the regional workshops that will be held in 1983 as a follow-up to the National Policy Workshop. (For more information on the regional workshops, contact the ECS Interstate Migrant Education Project.)

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